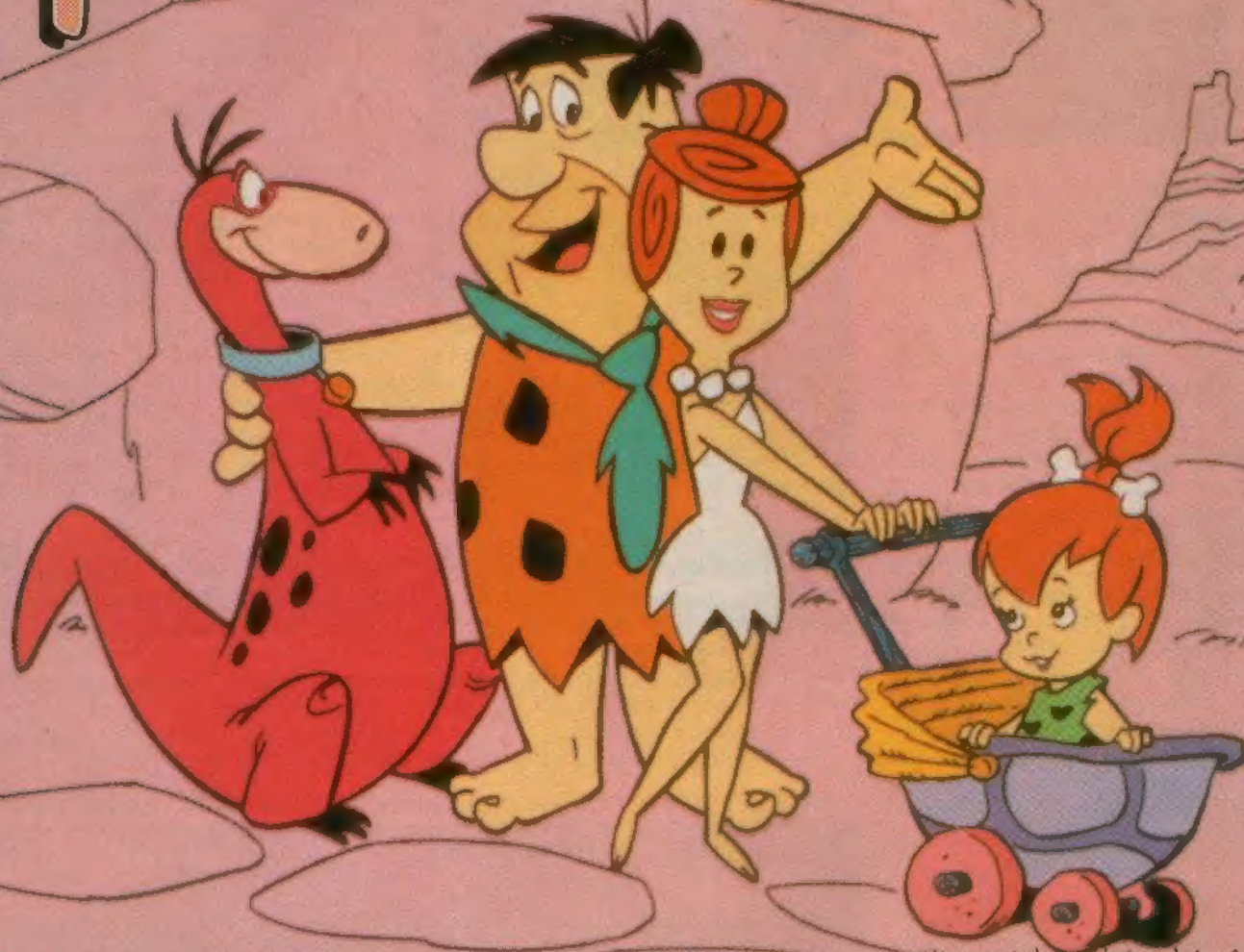


Without Jean VanderPyl,
Fred Flintstone's wife &

Speaking of Wilma...

the Jetsons' mechanical
maid would be speechless.



For more than 50 years, Jean VanderPyl's voice characterizations have entertained animation enthusiasts around the globe. Surviving media changes and technological advances, VanderPyl, 71, has hundreds of voices to her credit, including that of America's favorite cavewife, Wilma Flintstone.

Long before television exploded into life, VanderPyl's dramatic talents graced the national airwaves via radio. She reluctantly admits to beginning her career right out of high school in 1937, and during radio's heyday, she worked with the top of the trade, Lucille Ball, Bob Hope, Red Skelton, Art Linkletter, Al Jolson and George Burns and Gracie

By J. DOOLEY

Allen. Then, she turned her talents toward the new medium, television.

As television came to be the mecca of home entertainment, VanderPyl played cameo roles on many baby-boomer favorites, including *Leave It to Beaver*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* and others, but her most unforgettable role came as Fred Flintstone's wife.

At the time, William Hanna and Joseph Barbera were casting for their latest TV animation projects. Fresh from New York, VanderPyl was ushered into Hanna-Barbera's fledgling Hollywood offices.

"It must have been late 1957 or early 1958," the actress recalls in her San Clemente home overlooking the Pacific Ocean. "And Joe and Bill had just gone into business for themselves. They had a little two-man office and a secretary. No studio or anything."

"I had a new agent, and he was a real go-getter. Joe was easy to see then, and my agent went in and gave a pitch for me. They had this little character coming up in a show [*Snooper & Blabbermouse*] and I auditioned for it."

"He [Barbera] was at a loss about hiring women, because up until that time, men had played all the female [animation] roles. The parts were all so small. The early stuff was mostly cats



"I knew Wilma was going to be liked when *The Flintstones* was originally shown on television," says Jean VanderPyl.

and then we would all read the script once around the table, aloud. Then, we all got up on mike and started recording. We stood up there and *acted* it. It was just like a radio show. We jumped around the studio and stage.

"There was a great deal of personal interplay between us. I remember, an example of that was when Pebbles [another one of VanderPyl's voices] was born. That last scene of Wilma in the hospital bed with Pebbles for the first time, I actually cried. I really did, because we were *acting* that part. I just had a few babies around that time and it was very real to me. Alan Reed had such a big heart, too; more than once, we got a little teary."

chasing canaries, a lot of action and no words. They weren't used to much dialogue anyway, so they had men do it.

"That was my initial contact with Hanna-Barbera. I got the part. So, later, when other women's roles would come up, Joe would call and have me audition over the phone!

"Eventually, other actresses got on the stick too. Their agents got busy when they saw what was happening in the cartoon world. I firmly believe I was the first woman's voice for Hanna-Barbera."

Consequently, VanderPyl explains, "By the time they got around to *The Flintstones*, I had worked many different shows for Joe, so he included me in *all* of his auditions. But this time, they had us come into the studio...into a studio, because theirs still wasn't built yet. This was going to be something *big*, they hoped, so they had many people come in.

"I got Bea Benaderet to audition with me, because Joe wasn't familiar with her work. She was a well-known radio actress too, but people would recognize her face from television. She was Kate on *Petticoat Junction*. We came in and read both parts.

"She read Wilma and I read Betty. I read Wilma and *she* read Betty. That was really fun! Joe liked us both, and right then and there, he says, 'Who wants to be Wilma and who wants to be Betty?' That wouldn't happen today. I said I wanted to play Wilma. I just had a feeling for that character. I liked her better. He said, 'OK.'

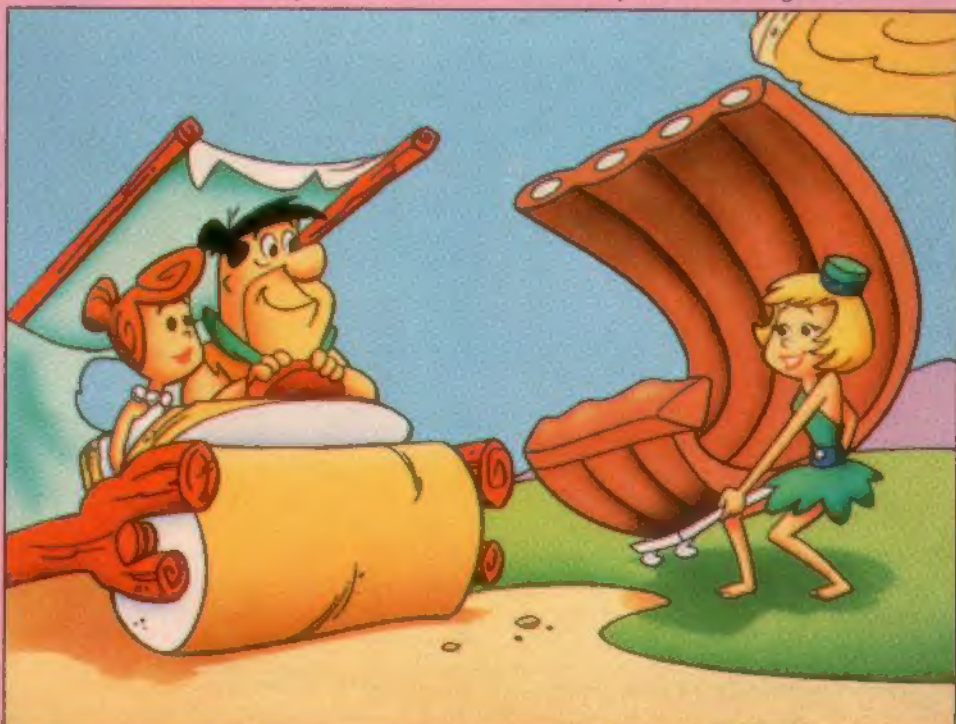
"I really admire the characters from *The Flintstones*," she confesses. "Mel Blanc [Barney Rubble], Alan Reed [Fred Flintstone], such wonderful guys. I knew them for many years. The four of us were all together on *The Burns &*

Allen Show. That's one of the reasons why *The Flintstones* went as well as it did. We got along great. I think it was *felt* that we were all such good friends. That made it real—we all really loved each other."

Recalls the actress, "It was all so casual and fun in those days. We would all read the script over and over, then we would come to the characters that weren't appointed yet. Joe would say, 'Jean, what do you have for this character? Let me hear a voice for this.' I would look at the little character and try a voice. Then, he would say, 'Bea, what have you got?' She would try a voice, then one of us would get the part." For most of the three seasons of *The Flintstones*, in fact, all of the female characters were played by either Benaderet or VanderPyl.

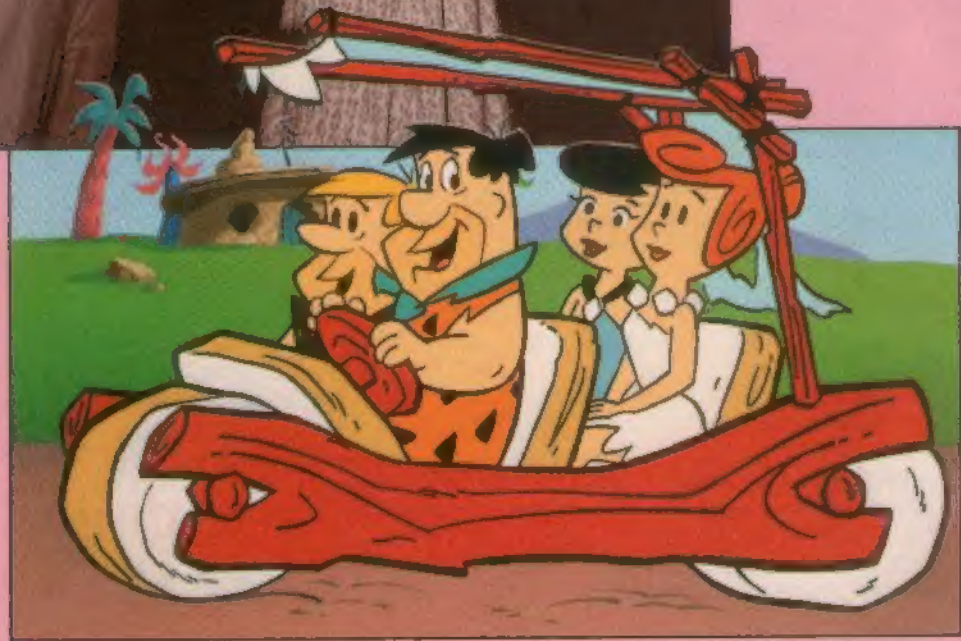
"Joe would show us the storyboards

"Alan Reed had such a big heart," remembers VanderPyl of Fred's original voice.





"I think it was felt that we were all such good friends," notes VanderPyl of the chemistry between herself (in black), Alan Reed, Bea Benaderet and Mel Blanc that brought the cave couples to life.



you!" I never thought of it that way. I loved hearing that. It's really satisfying.

"My own son tells me, 'Mom, do you realize how famous you are?' I know this sounds awfully hammy, but being a radio actress, you're always anonymous, so I've never gotten any kind of star treatment.

"Now they come up to me in restaurants, the father carrying the kids, and he is the one grinning from ear to ear. His eyes light up and he says, 'I cannot believe I am meeting Wilma! You babysat me for six years.' It sure means much more than it ever did before.

"It's very gratifying and lots of fun to see people's faces light up. My water man was here this very morning and I told him I wasn't ready for him. I said I was up late the night before at the Hanna-Barbera *Flintstones* Anniversary party. 'What were you doing there?' he says. I told him that I do Wilma's voice. Well, he almost dropped the bottle! He said, 'What? You're kidding me!' So, then, he stayed and asked questions for 10 minutes. He ended up being late on his route. He

said what so many of them do, 'Why, I grew up with you.'"

Of the many *Flintstones* episodes VanderPyl worked on, a few favorites stand out. One of them, *The Flintstones Meet Rockula and Frankenstone*, a TV special now available on video, holds a special place in her heart.

"The Flintstones win a prize on a talk show and go on vacation to Rockula's castle. Real cheesy. Well, Rockula, after 500 years in the basement, comes upstairs and thinks, since Wilma is asleep in his wife's bedroom, she is his long-lost wife. Wilma finally convinces him she isn't his wife, but he's already greatly enamored of her, wants her to marry him. Wilma says, 'But I can't! I am already married!' And then, John Stevenson [the voice of Mr. Slate], who plays Rockula, says, 'I can take care of that.' He's going to kill Fred. The Rubbles are there and there is a chase through the castle.

"Being a ham, I guess, the thing I liked most was at the script's end. They return home and Rockula fol-

lows. He says, 'I will move the castle over here stone by stone.' Wilma says, 'Well, all right, but you'll have to take Pebbles to her dancing lessons on Tuesday; I play tennis on Thursday, dah-dah-dah...' She does this female thing for a page-and-a-half of solid dialogue, of what he'll have to do, and you see him shrivel and become a bat and take off.

"The reason I have a soft spot for that script, is that last page-and-a-half of fast, funny dialogue. I did it straight through in one take. It worked out just fine. When I finished, the whole cast applauded. And *that* is a rare thing, to have your peers do that. It meant so much to me, Mel Blanc, Alan Reed, the whole bunch of them. When they give you that kind of recognition, it leaves a very warm feeling in your heart."

Another of VanderPyl's Hanna-Barbera creations, Rosie the Robot of *The Jetsons*, grew in popularity and is still a favorite with fans. VanderPyl was asked to create a distinctive voice for the futuristic family's new robot.

"I don't think anyone expected

One of VanderPyl's treasured moments from the series was the birth of Pebbles (whom she also voiced with "goos").



Rosie to go as far as she did," she recalls. "Rosie was born in 1963. I had worked on *The Jetsons* several times before she was introduced. The Jetsons went to a robot store to hire a maid. All the robots were paraded out in

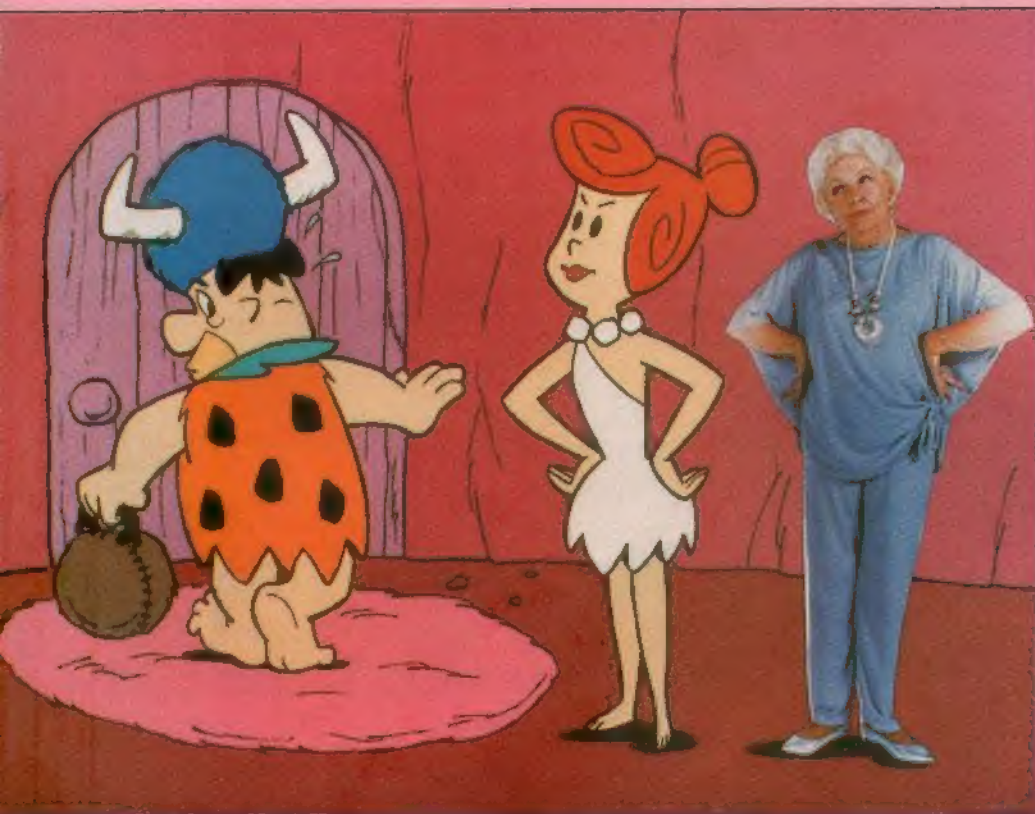
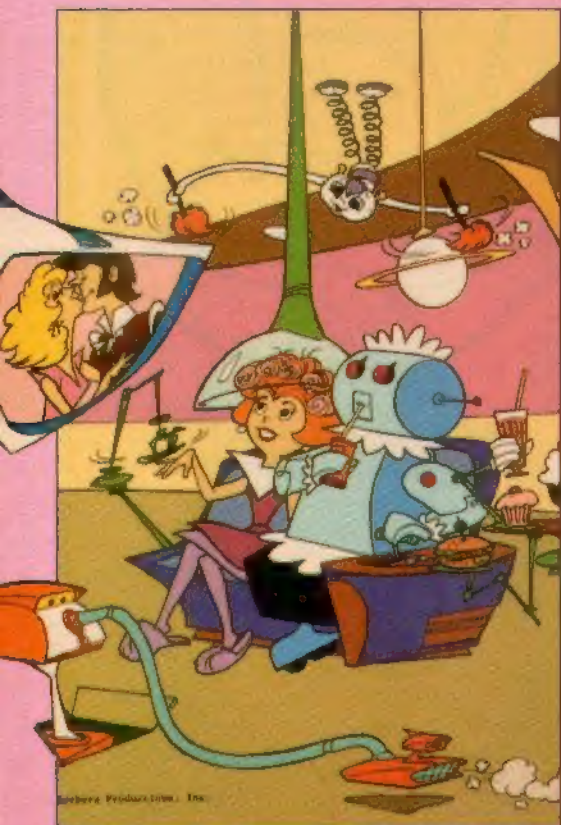


Photo: Courtesy Jean VanderPyl

front of Jane, for her to select from. Rosie was not old—broken down, but she was not the new French model." VanderPyl's voice transforms into that of a young French girl's, "Oh, oui, monsieur!"

"I did seven voices on that particular episode," she says in her own voice, which sounds little like her fa-

VanderPyl was given more leeway in her "creation" of Rosie the Robot.



mous characters'. "More than I ever had in a single show. I did all the other maids auditioning."

Having a freer hand in the development of Rosie than she did with Wilma, VanderPyl searched for just the right voice. "I really had to rack my brain for Rosie," she states. "I thought and I thought. Then, it came to me. I said, 'Wait a minute...Hazel [the '60s TV maid played by Shirley Booth]. This was the gal. She was older and a bit intimate with the boss, she told folks off, but she wasn't too bad about it. That's perfect for Rosie. That's where I got the idea for 'OK, Mr. J., never fear when Rosie's here.' They liked it and went with it."

Moving on in her years, VanderPyl remembers a *Jetsons* episode that again, she takes to heart. "My very favorite was the time Rosie feels really old. I guess that's why I relate to it now; she feels old and her circuits aren't working well anymore. She sees George Jetson looking at new model robots, although he's really there to buy replacement parts for Rosie, and she figures, 'That is all. This is it. The end of me. My time is up.' Then, she leaves a note for the family and heads for the junk heap. She's going to jump into the pressers to commit suicide. It's really sad. They rescue her and take her home."

Contrary to common belief, *The Jetsons* lasted a much shorter time than *The Flintstones*. The original series actually aired for only a single year, although that one season has been shown endlessly in syndication ever since. However, "About five or six

With the promise of a new animated, two-hour TV movie for NBC, VanderPyl is getting her wish for a *Flintstones* revival. Now, if only she could collect residuals on the original series.

years ago, the kids in college took up *The Jetsons* again," VanderPyl says happily. "Almost like the Trekkers, they started wearing *Jetsons* T-shirts and other stuff. My own son was wearing them. Hanna and Barbera said, 'Time to get on the bandwagon.' They decided to make two more years of *The Jetsons*, 40–42 new episodes, for syndication [STARLOG #101].

"So," VanderPyl laughs, "they brought the original cast back. We were the oldest cast in Hollywood. George O'Hanlon [who played George Jetson, CS #15] was blind and in a wheelchair. He had had a stroke so they recorded him separately, and of course, Mel Blanc, Daws Butler and myself. Penny Singleton just turned 80, she's the original Jane Jetson, she got her voice back up. We all managed to match our original voices."

Later, most of the original cast was reunited for 1990's *Jetsons: The Movie*, including VanderPyl who played Rosie, Mrs. Spacely and Spacely's secretary, Miss Galaxy. Among the missing were the original voices of Elroy and Judy Jetson. "They had to find somebody to do Elroy for the movie. They auditioned all kinds of people to imitate that voice, because Daws Butler, who played Huckleberry Hound, Yogi Bear and Elroy died."

"Daws was a wonderful man. He was also the original Beany of *Beany & Cecil*. That's how he started his career. He liked to train other actors from all over the country, and Patric Zimmerman, the person who got the Elroy part, was one of Daws' students. For Patric, it was a special role because he was imitating his teacher's voice."

VanderPyl is less enthusiastic about the situation regarding Judy. "Janet Waldo [Judy Jetson] was replaced. I think it was to pick up a younger audience, but she's completely devastated."

The role of Judy in *Jetsons: The Movie* was undertaken instead by Tiffany, who was originally scheduled to sing a few songs to accompany Waldo's dialogue. "She [Tiffany] wouldn't do the songs unless she could do the part, too. So, they cut out Janet, who had done Judy all these years. They dubbed in all of Judy's lines with Tiffany. To me, that's just heartbreaking. After all these years, it's just *not* the same. Especially when it's such a part of what people have grown up with."

Both a critical disappointment and a box office failure, *Jetsons: The Movie* (now on videocassette) stands as more

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VanderPyl

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than just a full-length cartoon. It marks the end of an era. Shortly after taping, George O'Hanlon died. "He passed away on the movie set," VanderPyl somberly says. "I went back in for pickups and rejects, and as I drove in the parking lot, he was being taken away in an ambulance. George was in doing pickups when he had a stroke. He went to the hospital and didn't live the day out. Right before that, at the end of the last *Jetsons* series, we lost Daws Butler. I'm almost superstitious about doing any more *Jetsons*. Who is going to go next?" Soon after *Jetsons: The Movie* was finished, Mel Blanc (Mr. Spacely, see STARLOG #102) died.

Although she still does some voice work, most recently resurrecting Winnie Witch for the *Fender Bender 500* segment of Hanna-Barbera's new morning program, *Wake, Rattle & Roll*, she is semi-retired. "I am walking with a cane these days," she sighs. "I'm on Social Security and a pension. Once in a while, I work when they have something." Surprisingly, after so many years of doing voice work, VanderPyl's residual income leaves much to be desired.

"I would be a wealthy lady if I had gotten residuals from *The Flintstones* all these years. What happened...in the '60s, even our own union [Screen Actors Guild] didn't realize that any TV show would play more than six runs. *The Flintstones* and *I Love Lucy* taught our union, and everyone else, that these things can go on forever.

"We should get residuals, but we don't. Even when you do get them, it drops so far. I got a bunch of back residuals a couple of weeks ago, for a year or so of shows, like 42 checks at once, for \$19, \$13.80, like that."

For her many fans, there is a slew of VanderPyl's work available on TV or in video stores. Her numerous characters appear in hundreds of Hanna-Barbera cartoons, including *Atom Ant*, *Hong Kong Fooey*, *Quick Draw McGraw*, *Tom & Jerry*, *Popeye*, *Magilla Gorilla* (VanderPyl played Magilla's friend, Ogee. "She always went around saying, 'Oh, gee!' so they called her Ogee."), and *The Flintstone Kids* (as Wilma's mother).

For the diehard admirer, some of her live action work pops up occasionally on replays of *Murder, She Wrote*, *Hardcastle & McCormick* and as Gladys Frisbee, the town biddy on *Petticoat Junction*.

Watching a slow moving train pass between her window and the ocean, Jean VanderPyl smiles thoughtfully. "What I really wish, is that they would revive *The Flintstones*!"

CS